

**Speech for Commissioner Hübner
Intervention at the event organised by ANCI-IDEALI**

Rome, 22 March 2007, 17h00

Dear Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the ANCI-IDEALI Foundation, and Maria Baroni for the invitation to address today at this event.

Many people are in these days gathering in Rome for the celebrations, all roads lead to Rome today.

Your award is a great pleasure and honour, and I am glad to receive it with Minister and former European Commissioner Emma Bonino.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Italian National Association of Municipalities for its continuous efforts in promoting the values of community policies. I know that ANCI has always acted towards spreading the European ideals and spirit, in the Italian and European context. Your recently created European Foundation of Cities, which is already growing, will further promote the role of cities and local communities in the political debate and reinforce the relationship between Italian and European cities.

I am convinced that you could indeed favour a dialogue between the different levels of governance, and promote the exchange of experiences and best practices.

Today's meeting celebrates the first 50 years of a united Europe. The anniversaries are always marked by the temptation to look at the achievements, and certainly this 50th anniversary will not escape this habit. If I think of one lesson to be drawn from the history of our integration, what is important today for the future of Europe, as it was 50 years ago, is that Europe must be a joint project, taken forward in a strong spirit of solidarity.

Europe is a dynamic entity; we can say that it is in permanent movement. Each generation contributes with something new. And each generations is faced with new ideas, new challenges, new opportunities. Today's actors were not present when all this started. And future generations will build the common Europe with totally different perceptions of what today seems unthinkable or unachievable.

But there seems to be one things which we will have in common, both with our predecessors and with the future generations. The conviction that the political potential of Europe, its political strength, depends on the involvement of the people.

The common European interest has always been much more than a simple sum of national interests. But today global changes, are increasing dramatically the value added of the European approach. An essential part of this approach is regional policy and its contribution to this unprecedented experiment of multi-layer, trans-national democracy.

Although the objectives of Cohesion policy can be traced back to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, it was not until 1975 and, above all, with the accession of Greece (1981) and then Spain and Portugal

(1986) that Cohesion policy was given impetus, and an ambitious drive to European integration. The landmark reforms of 1988 doubled the budget for the Cohesion Policy and introduced a number of principles for its implementation which remain at the core of the policy: multi-annual programming, financial and thematic concentration, additionality and partnership.

Today, Cohesion policy could be represented as '*the leading edge of a system of multilevel governance in which supranational, national, regional and local governments are enmeshed in territorially overarching policy networks*'. It is true that Cohesion Policy has traditionally been one of the most visible EU policies on the ground. It has developed a powerful multi-level governance method involving a large number of partners (European Commission, Member States, regions, cities, socio-economic partners, NGOs, etc.) level. Since there is no one-fits-all recipe, the involvement of regional and local authorities – in programming, managing, evaluation and control of the interventions– is essential to ensure the success of the policy.

We have reinforced today the urban dimension. The role of the cities in shaping the European economy is fundamental.

The role of regional and local partners in the European construction has been increasingly acknowledged and it continues to grow in importance. This enhanced role is not only the result of political demands but also the recognition that regions and cities matter both as engines and beneficiaries of socio-economic development.

The new Cohesion Policy 2007-2013 has become a corner-stone for the successful implementation of the renewed Lisbon Agenda. As discussed in the European Council of last 8 and 9 March held in Brussels, the 2006 Annual Progress Report on the Lisbon Agenda clearly shows that the involvement of the regional and local authorities in the growth and jobs agenda is now a reality.

The celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome and the reflections on the future of Europe give us the opportunity to analyse the institutional re-launch. The solution must be found in the Constitutional Treaty, whatever the form it will finally have.

The Draft Constitutional Treaty contains provisions which are of direct relevance to cohesion policy and which I warmly welcome: provisions which recognise local and regional self-government, extend subsidiarity to them, and broaden the concept of cohesion to include the territorial dimension. These provisions would help us to ensure that the principle of multi-level governance becomes firmly established in the European Union, and would improve the design and implementation of our policies across a wide range of areas.

I firmly believe that the reinforcement of the role of regions and cities is a deep-rooted tradition and a powerful tool in Cohesion Policy. It will support the establishment of multi-level governance as a corner-stone principle of the EU functioning.

The prominent role of the territorial communities in the re-launch of the EU needs the mobilisation of the citizens. The needs are identified at local level, and it is at this level that the solutions shall be found. The process should go two ways: the EU institutions

should of course do more for their citizens (and explain better what they do, by translating their action into specific messages in a concrete context on the ground), and the citizens should be more involved in the European construction by being active actors of our policies.

To conclude, let me again say that we have in our hands a powerful tool to reconnect the citizens with the EU project. European Cohesion Policy. It involves people at the regional and local level because it is here where the necessary expertise to identify problems and find suitable solutions lies.

Be it the regional and local dimension of the innovative process (through clusters and proximity networks), the challenges brought by ageing and migration flows, the need to provide tailored advanced services to SMEs, or the requirements to adapt and better match education and training with the labour market needs, in all that the regional and local dimension matters.

I therefore consider important that – at this crucial moment in the re-launch of the constitutional process – regional and local authorities make their voice heard and solemnly confirm their commitment to the principles that constitute the foundation of the European project.

In that respect, the activities and efforts of your Foundation are extremely valuable.

Thank you very much for your attention.